Protection Division

Imagine that it is 10:30 p.m. and you re sitting in your living room with your shoes off, your feet up on the hassock, and you re waiting for the Late Show to come on television.

You ve had a hard day. This morning you walked over a farm with the owner and pointed out to him the places where quail food plots should go, and where he should plant the wildlife bundle you brought to him. You carefully went over the farm plan to increase his quail that you helped draw up.

In the afternoon you patrolled a stream with a fellow conservation agent, dragging for fish traps. It was hard work and you had foolishly scheduled a talk with the PTA that evening and had to do that before you could call it a day. A quiet evening with the family looked mighty attractive when you arrived home a few minutes ago. You decided to just leave the canoe on the car and put it away in the morning.

Then the phone rings. It s a call from an irate lady whose home is near a Department stream access. She s upset about the noise and goings-on, and would you come and put a stop to it?

You drag on your shoes, buckle on your pistol belt and off you go into the night. Alone.

When you arrive on the scene there s obviously a wild party in progress. There s blaring music from the open door of a van. A group of a dozen young men and women are singing and laughing, trash and beverage cans scattered everywhere. It s a situation that modern conservation officers occasionally face.

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But it s not just the bad times-the long hours and confrontations in the dark-that get remembered.

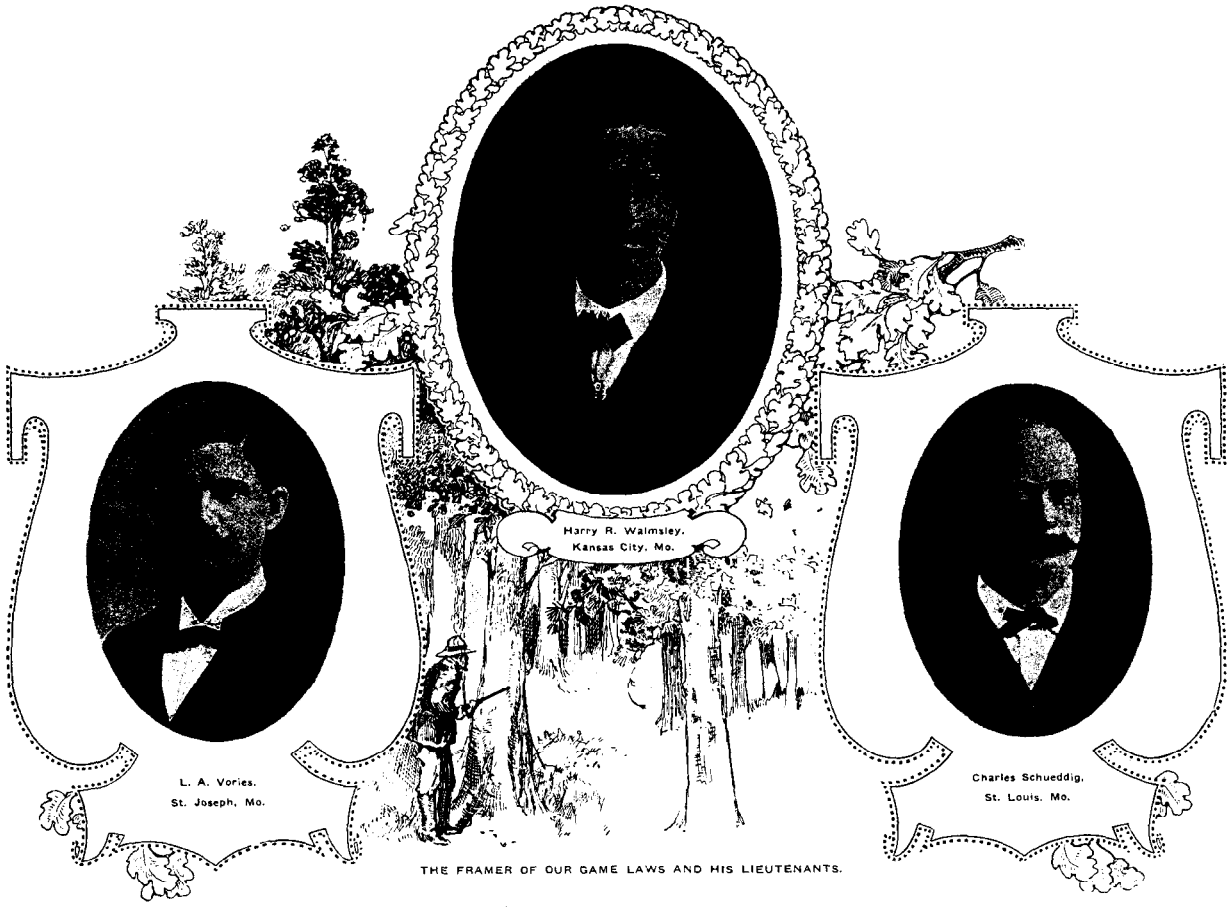
Assistant Regional Supervisor Chester Vermaas retired August 31, 1986, after thirty-one years of service in Protection. In his final monthly report he wrote:

I hope, in at least some small way, I have been able to contribute something which will make this world a better place for generations that will follow. There has been nothing heroic or outstanding in this struggle, just the simple things such as pointing out the beauty of a prairie coneflower to an eager youngster or sharing a few happy moments with a successful fisherman on the bank of a creek.

I know I will think back on the times when I listened to the booming prairie chickens at dawn, the gabble of gathering mallards at sunset and the croaking of bullfrogs in the marsh at night. Many things will remain vivid in my mind, such as the thousands of persons contacted at twenty-five Missouri State Fairs, the long vigils on the Osage River shoals, the occasional overturned canoe, the hip boot suddenly filling with icy cold water, the miles of slimy trotlines and the boats filled with tar-covered hoop nets; those walks along the creeks through tall horseweeds well-laced with wet spider webs, those stinging nettles, tick bites, chiggers, mosquitoes and an unforgettable bout or two with poison ivy. I have witnessed the construction of five of Missouri s major impoundments and now enjoy seeing thousands of citizens utilizing those areas. I hope I was able to help get the deer and turkey back in Missouri through enforcement efforts and look forward to the time when river otters, grouse, trumpeter swans, bald eagles, pheasants and other species are much more numerous.

I will be leaving with a treasure house of marvelous memories. Although there were some frustrations and disappointments along the way, the joy of doing a job which I liked, to the best of my ability, overshadows the bad times.

In any fish and wildlife department, protection or law enforcement has always been one of the basic management tools. The enforcement division usually has the most manpower, and in many places law enforcement



The first comprehensive game law in the state was the Walmsley Act of 1905. Harry R. Walmsley was duly honored as the "framer of our game *laws* in *this page from* **Our Fish, Game, Song Birds and Forestry,** *a book of sportsmen s clubs published the same year.*

was the major activity of the department until modern fish and game management came to the front in the 1930s.

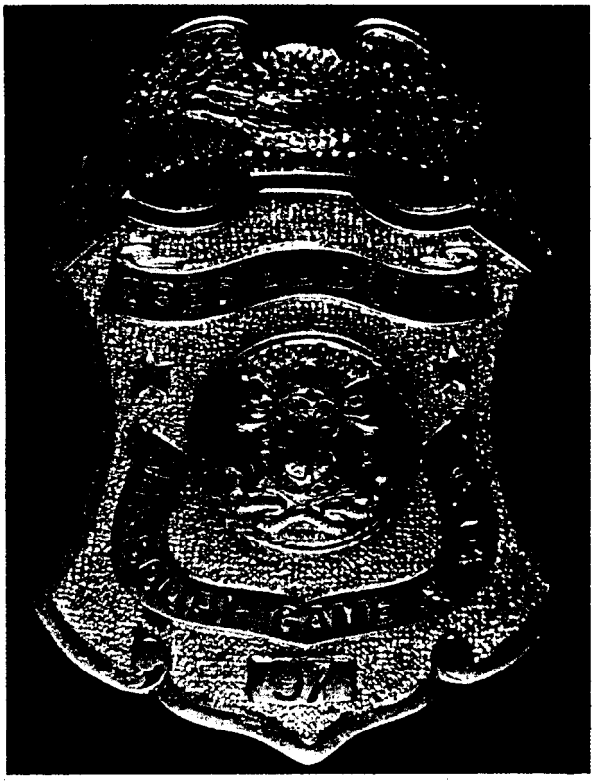
Missouri didn t have effective wildlife law enforcement until passage of the Walmsley Act in 1905, the first comprehensive game law that provided for enforcement. When the new Conservation Commission came into being it inherited a force of forty politically-appointed game wardens and some 5,000 special deputy wardens. These latter were political cronies and were hired on a temporary basis at $4 per day, when needed.

The passing out of honorary law enforcement commissions was a popular thing in those days.[1] The old Fish and Game Department also issued courtesy cards which identified the bearer as a friend of conservation and of this Department. You can imagine the reaction of a politically-appointed game warden who, upon apprehending a game law violator, was shown one of the cards.

One of the knotty problems facing the new Conservation Commission was the recall of honorary deputy commissions and courtesy cards, and getting game law enforcement on a professional basis.

Director I. T. Bode and Sydney Stephens

[1] **When such honorary commissions were rescinded in Illinois, for example, it was found that a great many had been issued to men in the Cicero area, a suburb of Chicago, and were serving to legalize the** carrying of concealed **weapons** by hoodlums.



There were once 5,000 badge-holding "special *deputies -political cronies who worked temporarily* for *$4 a day. The new Commission did away with the practice, along* with *the force* of *politically appointed game wardens.*

wanted to upgrade law enforcement personnel from stereotypical game wardens to agents for conservation. There had been no special qualifications for wardens, other than political endorsement, and they spent their time exclusively on law enforcement or political activities. The laws they enforced were enacted by the general assembly and based largely on what was considered acceptable public opinion, not on facts backed by research.

These were the men, some devoted to protecting wildlife despite their political backgrounds, who came to typify the game warden. He was the butt of jokes in stories and cartoons. A host of epithets followed him— "skunk sheriff," "rabbit warden," "brush cop," to name a few. Bode wanted to change all this.

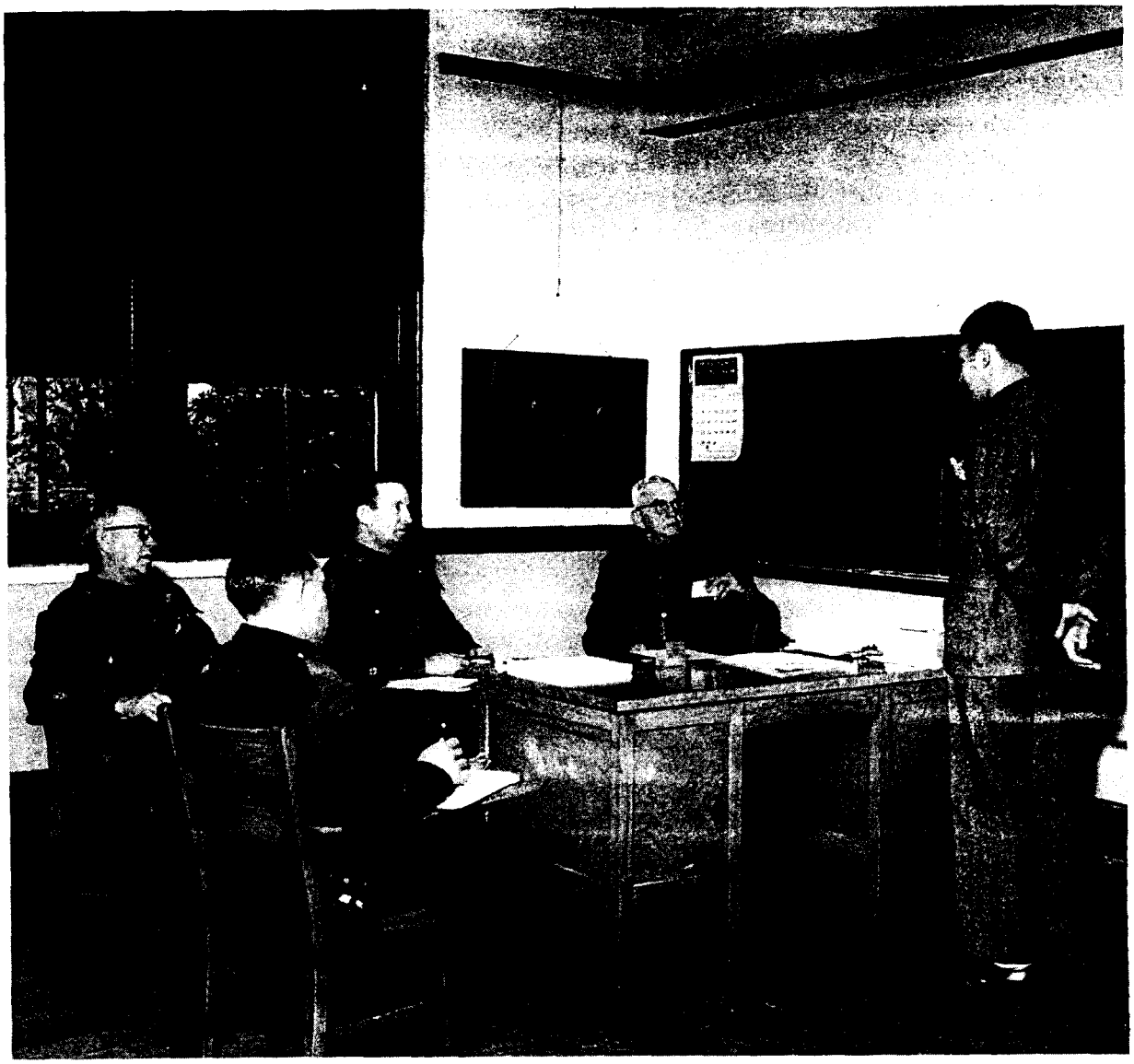
The Pennsylvania Game Commission at that time had what was considered the best warden force in the country and W. C. Shaffer of that Commission was asked to set up a recruitment procedure for the new Missouri Department. He devised oral and written examinations and from these applicants were to be ranked.

In February, 1938, the Department put out a call for applications and received 751 of them. The interviews were conducted in May at St. Joseph, Cape Girardeau, Warrensburg, Springfield, St. Louis and Macon. Written examinations were given to 480 applicants in Jefferson City in April. On June 27, 1938, a slate of thirty-five men was appointed as conservation agents. Fourteen of the original forty game wardens were retained, and four of them were appointed as supervisors: Joseph Green, Cave Johnson, W. G. Noble and J. Vernon Bennett.3 In August,

Conservation agents were rigidly schooled and tested before *they passed muster and went to work in the field. A class* of *agent trainees takes an exam administered by Paul Brooks in* **1961.**

2 The name was soon after changed to "wildlife" conservation agents, to distinguish them from Soil Conservation Service field men, also called conservation agents.

3 The others who made the transition from warden to conservation agent were C. T. Sanders, M. G. McKinley, T. H. Bagnell, M. K. Chapman, Wayland Ford, Frank I. Jones, George Laun and Charles Fleetwood. John P. Heller was retained as fur and fish market inspector and Cleval Corey as a river patrolman.



Candidates for the position of conservation agent were interviewed by four district supervisors. In this 1951 photo, a young candidate is sized up by supervisors Riley ***Gladden (back to camera), Joe Green, M. K. Chapman and Edgar Allen.***

Asbury Roberts, an attorney by training, was hired as Chief of the Protection Section, at that time a part of the Game, Fish and Forestry Division.

The new agents were assigned, for administrative purposes, to one of four districts under a district supervisor,[4] but not before they were required to undergo an intensive two-week training course which included instruction in basic game management techniques, wildlife identification and other subjects related to a modern conservation program.

As former Chief of Protection James L.

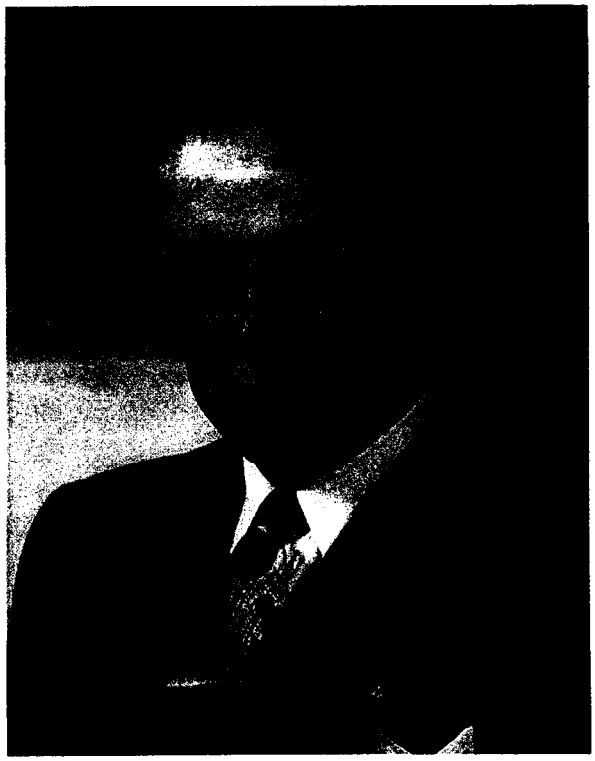
[4] Later, the term "region" was applied, when these were further subdivided into districts. As the force grew the number of supervisory regions was increased to nine.

Agents gathered for a conference at Meramec State Park September 28, 1941. Uniformed agents are, left to right: Leonard Rowe, Kenneth Hicks and M. K. Chapman.

Bailey wrote: Personnel from the Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit [headed by Dr. Rudolf Bennitt] served as instructors and they endeavored to impress upon the new agents the need for coordinated effort on the part of everyone. Much emphasis was placed on the part conservation agents could play in bringing about a better public understanding of future wildlife management programs.

The new agents of 1938 went forth better trained than many agents hired later. In the early years when a new agent was hired, (usually one or two at a time as replacements) he was given his badge, a bundle of forms, a ***Wildlife Code to*** study and assigned to a county. It was expected that his district (regional) supervisor would take him in hand and give him finer instruction on the complicated job of being both a law enforcement officer and a local oracle on all things related to the outdoors. His supervisor would team him up occasionally with a veteran agent. Most of his knowledge about wildlife and enforcement was learned on the job.

By the late 1940s, Vernon Bennett, James L. Bailey, Dillard Branson or Paul Brooks, who supervised the special agent



J. Vernon Bennett was one of fourteen former game wardens retained as conservation agents. Bennett was hired as a supervisor and went on to serve as chief of Protectionfrom 1947-l970.

force, conducted a one or two week training class for new agents if several were hired at the same time.

But in 1951, Bode assigned Supervisor Paul G. Brooks the task of developing a formal course of instruction for conservation agents, and eight rookies were handed over to him for training.[5] The course lasted four and one-half months and covered every phase of Department operations, as well as law enforcement and courtroom procedure. Refined over the years, the course has been accredited by several state universities for twenty hours of college credit. It equips the wildlife conservation agent in a way his predecessors couldn t even imagine. Paul Brooks became the Department s first full-time training officer.[6]

5 That first conservation agent training class was composed of Chester Barnes, Fred Drummond Jr., Wilbur S. Barnhart, H. G. Gretlein, Glenn Hartsock, Jack Hoey, Edward Kattelmann and Lloyd Phillips.

6 Others serving as training officers over the years were Earl P. Coleman, John V. Frye and W. Creed Millsaps.

The 1952 agent training class poses on the steps of Stephens Hall. They are, top row, left to right: Paul Brooks, Bud Eyman and Lavon Penrod. Middle row: Leo B. Emmert, Jim Hardy, Charlie Guthrie and Lloyd D. Hursh. Front row: *Herb Schwartz,* Jim *Featherston; Harris White and Sam Cleeton.*

Nowadays, recruits live in a dormitory/ classroom building on Department headquarters grounds during their twenty-two weeks of training. Weekends they are sent into the field with veteran agents for more on-the-job training.

In January, 1941, in recognition of the important role the conservation agents were to play in the Department, Protection Section was taken out of the Fish, Game and Forestry Division and made a separate division, headed by Asbury Roberts.

In September, 1941, in a show of faith, the Commission adopted a policy statement that gave the conservation agents special status within the Department. The statement s rather turgid prose read as follows:

The development and expansion of the Commission s program and activities since the date of its creation has necessitated, from time to time, adjustments in the functions of the members of the staff and the respective divisions and sections . . . .

The Commission views with special approval . . . . the designation of the ***conservation agents as the official representatives of the Commission in connection with all of its activities in their respective districts.*** This plan, which has been developed by the staff through a series of several conferences, is regarded by the Commission as providing the means of rendering a continually expanding service with the maximum of efficiency . . . .

The Commission recognizes that the wider and more varied services which will henceforth be required of the conservation agents involve considerations of leadership, ability to cooperate with co-workers, and administrative capacity beyond those which would ordinarily attach to the functions of pure law enforcement. It feels confident that the members of the Protection Division will recognize these considerations and that they will measure up to the responsibilities as well as the opportunities of this broader service. The Commission declares its intention of recognizing, within the limits of its available resources, by advancement and by increased compensation, the development of the leader-

As official representatives of the Department, agents are on the front lines ***of public contact. Here young and old gather to watch Agent Bill Stark feed a pair of fawns*** at ***the 1949 Bethany Fair.***

ship and administrative qualities of the members of the Protection Division."[7]

This action reflected Bode s concept of the agent as much more than a game warden and imposed a special trust in the agents as a group within the Department. Probably nowhere else in the country at this time were such officers given so much responsibility and trust.

This broadened assignment was not universally liked by the agents themselves. Some of them, who were, oriented only toward law enforcement, were not eager to take on the additional responsibilities.

Paul B. Johnson, a rookie conservation agent at the time, recalls: I can remember we had a training conference at Cuivre River State Park. We still had some old political hangovers-supervisors and agents both-and it was proposed that the agents do a quail count and a dove count. Some of the old-timers started objecting, saying that they only wanted to be out there enforcing the law. Mr. Bode walked out on the stage and said, Gentlemen, I m trying to make conservation agents out of you. Now, if you want to be only game wardens, I ll pay you to be game

Bland Wilson of Houston typified the devoted conservation agent of the early days. Wilson ***served Texas County for twenty-one years, from 1944-l965.***

Agents proved the young Commission was serious about stopping poaching in this 1943 photo of a road check for licenses ***and illegal game. Road checks were an*** effective ***means of detecting*** violations-the ***amount Of illegal game*** seized ***often filled two station wagons-but increases*** in ***traffic volume eventually made them impractical.***

[7] At this time the term "Commission" was synonymous with "Department" and did not denote special representation of the four-member Conservation Commission.

wardens. But if you want to improve your lot and improve the program as a Missouri conservation agent, I ll pay you for being conservation agents. That silenced the objections.

Wardens had received a fee of $3, collected as part of the court costs, from each person convicted of a violation. In addition, the wardens collected a mileage allowance from the violator for miles driven in connection with the case. The fee undoubtedly influenced the warden s judgement in making arrests on minor violations or borderline infractions of the law, and the mileage allowance was another extra ? enjoyed by the wardens. One agent, in a six-month period, collected $162 in fees and $175.70 in mileage charges.

In 1941, Bode determined to do away with these perquisites, believing that such payments were subject to criticism. He suggested that prosecuting attorneys should encourage heavier fines instead. Conservation agents salaries were increased from $120 to $180 per month to offset some of the lost fees.

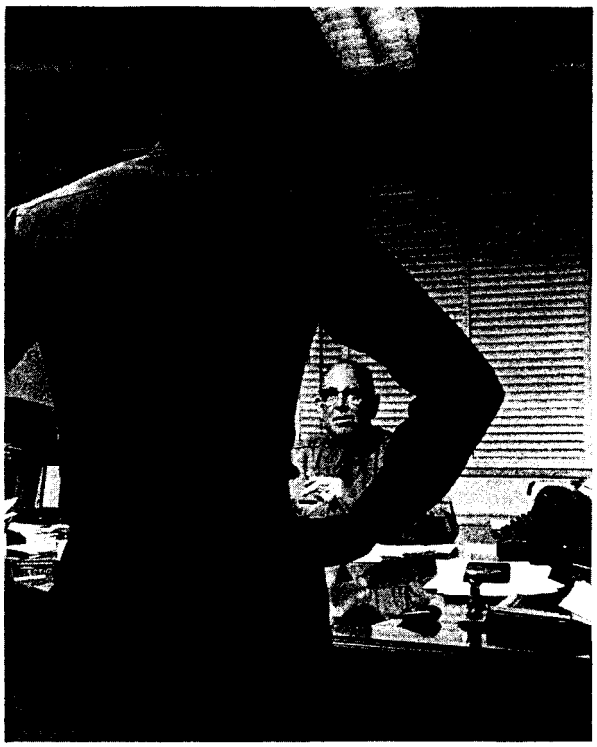
In March, 1947, the Protection Division was renamed the Field Division. The Field Service Section, with Kenneth R. Hicks as chief, was transferred from the Fish and Game Division to join the Protection Section. Jay B. Morrow became the new division chief, with J. Vernon Bennett named chief of Protection. Asbury Roberts was reorganized out of his job. When an assistant director post was created in 1949, and Morrow promoted to it, Bennett became the Field Division chief and James L. Red Bailey the new chief of the Protection Section.8

Later, the Education Section was added to the Field Division, but in 1977, both Education and Field Service sections were transferred out of the division and it again became the Protection Division, composed entirely of conservation agents.

Today the Protection Division is composed of a chief, two assistant chiefs for field and administration, a law enforcement research specialist, protection special assistant and covert operations supervisor. There are nine protection regions, each with a regional supervisor, assistant regional supervisor and a staff specialist. Regions are composed of from thirteen to nineteen conservation agents. Many conservation agents also carry federal deputy commissions after two years of service, and agents have full police powers on land owned, leased, managed or operated by the Department and also enforce boating and littering laws. They cooperate with all related law enforcement agencies in emergency situations when requested.

Are they effective? For over forty years their conviction rate has ranged between ninety-four and ninety-nine per cent, a record of success greater than any other type of law enforcement.

Besides law enforcement duties, today s agent is responsible for conservation education and information, planning and surveying for wildlife and fisheries, and is on the front



James L. Red Bailey was a well-known and popular conservation agent, regional supervisor and superintendent of conservation agents in a career that spanned thirty-four years, 1941-l975.

8 Other Field or Protection Division chiefs following Bennett's retirement in 1970 were: Paul G. Brooks Sr. (1969-77), Earl P. Coleman (1978-83) and Robert B. King (1983-present).

Conservation agents carry on the fifty-year tradition of license ***checks, but have undertaken duties as*** diverse ***as wildlife surveys, public programs and TV shows.***

line in investigating forest arson and water pollution cases.

Conservation agents usually work alone, unlike most law enforcement officers who work in pairs. Often their duties require working at night, and they face more armed citizens than any other type of policeman. Nationwide statistics show their chances of assault with a deadly weapon are seven times that of a typical police officer, yet Missouri has an exemplary safety record. Since 1937, only three agents have been wounded by gunfire in the line of duty. Two agents were ambushed by poachers at night in a southeast Missouri field. Another agent was accidentally blinded when a turkey hunter fired as he approached. One of the reasons for this fine safety record is the training agents receive in handling potentially dangerous situations.

This doesn t mean that a good many agents have not been physically assaulted when working alone at night on some river bank. In such situations they often give as good as they get, but today they are trained to avoid escalation into physical assault.

Agents are backed up by two-way radio contact that utilizes the latest equipment, and have a host of other aids to help them in their sometimes difficult jobs. On the forensic front they have a precipitin test to determine if suspected meat is game or not. A lead test can tell them if an archery kill was actually done by a bullet. Ballistic laboratory services are available, and there is a team to perform covert law enforcement duties when needed. Law enforcement research is also being conducted to help make their jobs even more effective. Since 1982, wildlife protection has been assisted by Operation Game Thief, which is a system whereby members of the public

can quickly report observed violations in complete anonymity. This is a reward program of the Conservation Federation of Missouri in cooperation with the Department and has resulted in a number of arrests that might not otherwise have been made.

Conservation agents promote wildlife habitat on private lands by working with landowners on programs like PAWS. Here Agent Larry Yowell discusses a plan for habitat improvement with *a farmer.*

Situations agents meet today often differ from those of earlier days. On public lands drug users are occasionally encountered, and agents are sometimes confronted with unruly crowds of drinkers. It takes diplomacy and skill to avoid serious problems in such situations. Training makes the difference, but it still takes an unusual person to handle the variety of things the modern conservation agent is expected to do.

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As you approach the gravel road that leads to the Department access, you think of all the eventualities your training has prepared you for-including the unexpected ones. But tonight you re lucky, the group of young people is already packing coolers and has turned off the tape deck. They respond politely to your questions, pick up their trash, and drive slowly up the road-just young people having fun on a warm night.

You breathe a sigh of relief, climb into your pick-up and drive home to enjoy what s left of the evening.

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Today s conservation agent-and there are now 145 of them-brings to the job a good educational background, helping to raise the occupation to professional status. Since 1978, a college degree has been required in law enforcement, wildlife, fisheries or forestry management, education, agriculture, journalism, or closely related biological sciences. Today s agents, in recognition of the strides made to professionalize them, are paid a great deal more than the $120 per month the first agents received. This has helped bring to the Conservation Department competent, well-rounded individuals who have been a potent force in advancing the Department s goals in every aspect of its programs.